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WILKINSON AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SPANISH CONSPIRACY

THE story of Spanish-American relations in the trans-Appalachian country after the Revolution is an interesting and important part of our history, a significant portion of the account of the struggle for the possession of the Mississippi basin. Some of the essential facts in this story have heretofore rested in obscurity. Much that has been written is based on suspicion and rumor, not on documentary evidence. Reliance has been placed on the assumptions of Humphrey Marshall¹ and on the assertions and reminiscences contained in the *Proofs* of Daniel Clark and the *Memoirs* of James Wilkinson. Indeed the temptation to fabricate theories in the absence of proof has been almost irresistible. Fortunately, a search in the Archivo Historico-Nacional in Madrid has brought to light material that now enables us to speak with more assurance and in some respects to neglect surmise for the solid ground of fact. Several documents were discovered, of which only one has hitherto been used by historians. The most important of these documents are Wilkinson's first memorial, of August 21, 1787, in English, addressed to Stephen Miro, the governor, and Martin Navarro, the intendant of Louisiana; his declaration of allegiance to the Spanish crown, August 22, 1787, in Spanish; and the formal report of Miro and Navarro, September 25, 1787, to Antonio Valdes y Bazan, the minister of war and treasury of the Indies.² The memorial, it is true, has already

¹ It is true that the rumors and conjectures of Marshall in his *History of Kentucky* happen to be substantially correct in many cases, as the Spanish records testify, but they are not sufficient in themselves to warrant conviction on a controversial point, when unsupported by documentary evidence. See below, page 496, as to Wilkinson's oath of allegiance to Spain.

² All of these documents are in the Archivo Historico-Nacional, Madrid, Papeles de Estado, Legajo 3893 A. In their report to Valdes, Miro and Navarro state that on account of the risks of navigation the English originals, both of the memorial and of the declaration of allegiance, were not sent to Spain at the time. The present writer has been unable to discover their whereabouts. Presumption points, however, to the possibility of their being among 2,500 bundles (*legajos*) of at least 200,000 documents consigned in 1888 from Havana, the former residence of the captain-general of Louisiana and the Floridas, to the Archives of the Indies in Seville, where they now lie in a confused heap on the floor of a cellar room. Owing to the parsimony or the poverty of the Spanish government, these papers, most of which concern the United States, are in their present form practically inaccessible to students, and are being slowly devoured by worms and rotted by mildew.

It is true, then, that in this paper I have not used the original English documents. In spite of this, however, I think there cannot be the slightest doubt of their authen-

been utilized by historians, but only in the expurgated form¹ in which Wilkinson read it before the Kentucky convention² of November 5, 1788. The three³ will serve as the chief authorities for the account that follows of Wilkinson's first trip to New Orleans, and will demonstrate that, not from the Spaniards, but from Wilkinson himself, came the suggestion of a political connection of the western settlements with Louisiana.⁴

At the close of the Revolution Spain withdrew the privilege of trade and navigation along the lower Mississippi, which she had permitted to the Americans as a part of the aid rendered to them against Great Britain before and after her formal alliance with France in 1779. As the settlements west of the Appalachians increased and thrived, a corresponding agitation arose to regain this right. The agitation based itself partly on economic necessity—the river being at that time the only possible outlet for the produce of the country—and partly on the treaty of 1783, whereby Great Britain ceded to the United States her right to navigate the Mississippi as it did, for the following reasons: (1) because of their substance and style; (2) because they are enclosed in an official letter of the ultra-reserved class signed personally by both Miro and Navarro; (3) because in their previous correspondence they never mention Wilkinson or the possibilities of negotiation with the Kentuckians; (4) because the letter in question, which is duplicated with all its enclosures in the Archives of the Indies, contains copies of the memorial, literal in English and translation into Spanish, and of a Spanish translation of the declaration of allegiance; (5) because the entire communication of the governor and intendant is devoted to comment on the two papers from Wilkinson and a description of Wilkinson's visit; (6) because the two officials assert that Wilkinson gave them the memorial and made the declaration of allegiance; (7) because in later communications of Spanish officials and of Wilkinson himself allusion is made to the fact that he was a Spanish subject and that he had furnished the memorial in question.

¹ For an abstract of this form see Marshall, *Kentucky*, I. 320–322, and Gayarré, *History of Louisiana: Spanish Domination*, 195, who quotes erroneously from Butler's *History of the Commonwealth of Kentucky*, rather than from Marshall.

² "In my opinion", writes Miro to Valdes, April 11, 1789 (Archivo Historico-Nacional, Papeles de Estado, Legajo 3893 A), "by this step he has compromised himself entirely, so that should he not succeed in severing Kentucky from the United States he will not be able to stay there, unless he has suppressed those articles which might be injurious to him—a possible procedure."

³ They are not found in the list of papers copied in the Spanish archives for Louisiana in the middle of the last century, and deposited in the office of the secretary of state at Baton Rouge. Cf. Gayarré, *History of Louisiana: Spanish Domination*, 211, note. In his *Winning of the West*, III. 132, note, Roosevelt, speaking of this work of Gayarré, observes: "He was the first author who gave a full account of the relations between Miro and Wilkinson and of the Spanish intrigues to dismember the West from the Union." But the description given by Gayarré of the earliest relations of Wilkinson with the Spanish authorities at New Orleans is derived absolutely from the three printed sources above mentioned, and notably from Marshall. The comparative fullness of his account, based on the copies of the Spanish manuscripts at Baton Rouge, does not appear until he takes up the occurrences of 1788 and the years following, after Wilkinson had returned from his first visit.

⁴ See pages 495, 498.

derived from the treaty of 1763 with Spain. The backwoodsmen felt that the government of the Confederation was doing nothing to aid them in this respect, and that in the negotiations of Jay with Gardoqui, the Spanish minister, it was even showing a disposition to surrender their claim to the navigation of the Mississippi for certain commercial advantages to the New England states. Other grievances existed as well, and were the ground of serious opposition to both Virginia and the Confederation. If unredressed, they might lead to a separation of Kentucky from the Union.

Both Gardoqui and Miro had good reason therefore to apprehend encroachment by the Americans on the Louisiana territory, and already had begun to take measures of precaution. Their policy of constructing a barrier against American aggression had assumed two forms: the one of encouraging settlement by the Americans, as well as by foreigners, on soil claimed to be Spanish along the east bank of the Mississippi; and the other of supplying arms and ammunition to the Indians against such of the backwoodsmen as trespassed upon the hunting-grounds of savages declared to be under Spanish protection. Neither had been productive of great results. A more powerful agency to combat the American advance must be discovered, and this seemed to be offered by the discontent of the Western settlers, if only some practical method of utilizing it could be devised. But, well informed as they were of this unrest, neither Gardoqui nor Miro had as yet sent emissaries to the Kentucky country when James Wilkinson arrived opportunely at New Orleans.

That officer had emigrated with his family from Maryland to Lexington, Kentucky, in 1783. At the outset he had identified himself with the agitation in regard to the Mississippi,¹ and had even advocated the separation of Kentucky and the other western settlements from the feeble confederation of Atlantic states,² in case the object sought for were otherwise unattainable. Since a trading partnership that he had set up with Major Isaac B. Dunn had not been successful, Wilkinson resolved early in 1787 to make a political and commercial venture in Spanish Louisiana; not, however, until he had discussed the scheme at length, with several men of like character, and prominent in the separatist movement.³ The ostensible motives of Wilkinson in undertaking this journey may be gathered from the statements in his *Memoirs*:⁴

My circumstances being at that period far from affluent, it became my duty to a young and beloved family, to endeavour, by all honourable means, to advance my fortune. . . . on my arrival in Kentucky, my ex-

¹ Marshall, *Kentucky*, I. 312.

² Clark, *Proofs*, appendix, 3, 4: "A Plain Tale", etc.

³ See below, p. 501 *et seq.*

⁴ II. 109-110, 112-113.

pectations were damped by the obstructions, which the Spaniards opposed to the free navigation of the Mississippi. . . . It is notorious that the measures of the federal administration were, at that time, feeble and dilatory. The formation of the national compact, under which we have acquired political importance, was then under consideration ; but, it was uncertain at what period the rights of Kentucky, to the navigation of the Mississippi, would be asserted and acknowledged. The pressure of these circumstances, produced my first voyage to New Orleans, with a view to promote my own fortune, and to benefit my fellow citizens, by awakening the Spanish government of Louisiana, to a just sense of its interests, and thereby to effect the commercial intercourse, which was indispensable to the prosperity of the western country. . . . When I first descended the Mississippi in 1787, the project of colonisation which occupied the mind of Mr. Gardoqui, was known to me, and I determined to employ this knowledge, either for my personal emolument or the interests of my fellow citizens. . . . To effect my primary object, the opening the navigation of the river, it was necessary not only to take the ground of safety to the province, but to shew the important advantages, which would be derived to the revenues of Spain, from a commercial intercourse between New Orleans and the settlements of the Ohio. To these considerations, an extensive scheme of colonization¹ was added. . . . There was another project,² depending on the preceding, which was considered of more importance, if it could be effected, in relation to the fortunes of the concerned ; this was, that I should demand for my services, in promoting the plan of colonization, the privilege of furnishing, a considerable annual supply of tobacco, to the Mexican market, which would have secured immense fortunes for me and my friends.

Contrary to this plea of poverty, Roosevelt asserts that within three years after Wilkinson's arrival in Kentucky he had "made a good position for himself in matters commercial and political."³ In Clark's *Proofs*,⁴ however, Wilkinson is represented as saying that "He at this period considered his hopes *jeopardised*, and determined to look abroad for what he had not found at home"—which, as Clark tartly remarks,⁵ "I suppose in English means that he was a bankrupt, and that being afraid of his creditors in Kentucky, he went down the Mississippi to seek his fortune and avoid their suits." Marshall, too, observes simply that "Wilkinson, whose habits required the expenditure of money ; and whose revenue demanded continued accession ; being commercially inclined—and seeing less difficulty in an intercourse with the Spaniards at New Orleans, than the rest of his countrymen : had, coeval with the determination in favour of separation from Virginia, decided upon making a voyage on the Mississippi."⁶ Perhaps it was only natural that those who had

¹ See below, p. 501, note 1.

² Cf. pp. 502, 503, note 2, 505.

³ *Winning of the West*, III. 124.

⁴ Appendix, 4 : "A Plain Tale", etc.

⁵ *Proofs*, 12.

⁶ *Kentucky*, I. 270–271.

noticed the share of Wilkinson in this plan of separation should associate the agitation on the subject of navigating the Mississippi, as well as of Spanish pretensions in general, with his trip southward, and believe Wilkinson interested in projects other than mere commercial ventures. Voicing accordingly the sentiment of his time, Marshall says further of Wilkinson, "his object was to effect a political connexion between Spain and Kentucky, of much more importance and extent, than that of shipping tobacco for the New Orleans market."¹ Roosevelt agrees with Gayarré that Wilkinson's primary incentive was pecuniary gain, but he adds² the impulse as well of a "restless, adventurous nature and thirst for excitement and intrigue". The same author surmises³ that "he started with the full intention of entering into some kind of corrupt arrangement with the Louisiana authorities, leaving the precise nature of the arrangement to be decided by events." Wilkinson's real motives and objects, however, were all of these and something more. They appeared definitely in his first memorial to Miro and Navarro.⁴

In April, 1787, after having freighted some flatboats with a small cargo of flour, butter, bacon, and tobacco, he embarked on the Kentucky river and, sailing down the Ohio and Mississippi, arrived at New Orleans on July 2.⁵ His military and political reputation had preceded him,⁶ and Miro forbore to seize his boats and cargo as contraband until the precise object of the American officer's visit could be ascertained.⁷ Upon landing Wilkinson was escorted directly

¹ *Ibid.*, 294.

² *Winning of the West*, III. 124.

³ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴ See below, p. 498 *et seq.*

⁵ Miro and Navarro to Valdes, September 25, 1787. "In July, 1787," writes Navarro to the king (April 30, 1789, Museo-Biblioteca de Ultramar, Madrid, *Papeles relativos á la Luisiana*, Vol. III.), "there arrived at New Orleans the ex-brigadier in the American service, Mr. James Wilkinson, a person endowed with high talents, and in whom the aforesaid [western] settlements have placed their hope of future happiness; and he informed the governor and myself that it was the intention of all to put themselves under the protection or vassalage of his Catholic Majesty." Wilkinson himself says that he landed in June (*Memoirs*, II, 109; Clark's *Proofs*, appendix, 4). This statement has been followed by Gayarré (p. 195) and Roosevelt (p. 124). To explain the discrepancy in the dates it may be suggested that Wilkinson had in mind the first of his flatboats, which preceded his arrival at New Orleans by several days. Cf. Clark's *Proofs*, appendix, 7.

⁶ Gayarré (*Louisiana*, III. 194) declares that Wilkinson had already corresponded with "some friends among the merchants of New Orleans" relative to the opening of trade between the western settlements and Louisiana. But neither Clark, Marshall, nor Wilkinson states that he had any extensive acquaintance with merchants of that city or had carried on a correspondence with them. Wilkinson, indeed, asserts distinctly (*Memoirs*, II. 109) that he was a "perfect stranger" when he first landed there.

⁷ The long account given by Clark (*Proofs*, appendix, 7) of the services rendered by his uncle in prevailing upon Miro not to confiscate Wilkinson's property, lest such severity might convert the general's influence in Kentucky into a force very dangerous to the safety of Louisiana, may be true, but all Miro and Navarro say in reference to the matter in their letter to Valdes, September 25, 1787, is that they had been informed that

to the "Government House" by a corporal of the guard and formally presented himself to Miro and Navarro. Their impression of him was highly favorable. "He is a young man of about thirty-three years of age", they write in their letter to Valdes,¹ "although he looks older. His bearing and manners also indicate that he has had an excellent education." Accordingly their reception of him was courteous and even encouraging, and he was permitted eventually to dispose of his cargo. At the next meeting with the governor and intendant, through the aid of their respective secretaries as interpreters, Wilkinson gave them an extensive account of the conditions in Kentucky and explained his purposes in coming to New Orleans. These he promised to elaborate into a memorial.

The evidence, therefore, seems clear that the idea and essential features of the memorial, whether written or not in part before his arrival at New Orleans, emanated from Wilkinson, and not from the Spaniards. Gayarré,² however, following Clark,³ states that before Wilkinson came Miro had cherished the idea of employing him as an agent to effect the "secession of Kentucky, and of the other discontented districts from the rest of the United States"; but he does not observe that Clark had already contradicted himself when he affirms in the same document⁴ that Miro was "unacquainted with the American government" and "ignorant even of the position of Kentucky with respect to his own province". This ignorance on the part of Miro seems, furthermore, to be borne out by Gayarré's assertion,⁵ apparently following Marshall,⁶ that Miro requested Wilkinson "to give his sentiments freely in writing, respecting the political interests of Spain and the inhabitants of the United States dwelling in the regions upon the western waters". In his *Memoirs*⁷ Wilkinson says merely, "Governor Miro, the intendant Navarro, and our interpreters, were the only persons, to whom my most interesting propositions were communicated." Marshall furthermore intimates that Wilkinson himself was the originator of the Spanish intrigue. Says that author:⁸

It is believed, on hints and inuendoes of General Wilkinson, that he composed an essay on the commerce of the Mississippi. . . . soon Wilkinson was the "first and principal person who had destroyed the enterprise which Brigadier [George Rogers] Clark had had in mind against Natchez" in the spring of the same year. Wilkinson flatly denies Clark's further assertion, however, (*Memoirs*, II., Appendix V; *Proofs*, appendix, 105) that his uncle had introduced Wilkinson to the governor and other officials. He declares that his meeting with the elder Clark, with whom he had no previous acquaintance, took place the day after his arrival (*Memoirs*, II. 109).

¹ September 25, 1787.

³ *Proofs*, appendix, 7-8.

⁵ *Louisiana*, III. 195.

⁷ II. 112.

² *Louisiana*, 194.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Kentucky*, I. 321-322.

⁸ *Kentucky*, I. 321-322.

after he decided on seeking his fortune in the New Orleans market — that it was taken with him as no inconsiderable part of his cargo — and there, became a subject of conference, if not of barter. There should be no doubt, but that, the objects of the essay, were examined, and canvassed between him, and the intendant: whence they came to understand each other; and some estimate put upon its value; and that subsequently it was revised, with a view of its being sent to the court of Spain, as a first fruit of his Catholic Majesty's new subject. The essay which was read, had merit, for the views it combined, of the relative interests, of the countries on the waters of the Mississippi. . . . Its being addressed to the *intendant*, and sent to the Spanish court with Wilkinson's approbation, instead of its being addressed, and sent to congress, shew conclusively, the bias, and the aim of the author.

On the other hand, Wilkinson would rather give the impression that he had composed the formal "essay" in New Orleans. "I have wrote this Essay", he remarks in the memorial, "under hourly intrusions, daily engagements and various inconveniences." And finally, to quote Miro and Navarro themselves,¹ "He [Wilkinson] made us an extensive relation of all that the enclosed memorial contains, which he offered to work out, as in fact he has done."

The personal attractiveness of Wilkinson and his powers of persuasion soon created a certain amount of intimacy with the two Spaniards, considerably deeper on his part than on theirs.² The knowledge also that he had acquired meanwhile of the commercial restrictions imposed by the laws of the Indies, the influence of Miro and Navarro themselves, his own ambition and desire for gain, as well as perhaps the mere logic of the situation, all impressed him with the necessity of renouncing his allegiance to the United States, as a powerful means of furthering his projects. He accordingly took the oath that made him a Spanish subject.³ Its language, even in its Spanish dress, is so characteristically Wilkinsonian in style as to leave no reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the document.⁴ In translation it runs as follows:

Self-interest regulates the passions of nations as well as of individuals, and he who imputes a different motive to human conduct either deceives himself or endeavors to deceive others. Still, while I maintain this truth,

¹ To Valdes, September 25, 1787.

² Cf. below, pages 503, 505, and notes.

³ It is quite possible that Gayarré, Roosevelt, and other writers who have failed to state this fact doubted the information of Marshall, based as it was on the gossip of the time. Marshall in his *History of Kentucky*, I. 283, 312, speaking of Wilkinson after his return from New Orleans, says, "soon it was rumoured . . . that he was a Spanish subject; having taken the necessary oath of allegiance, etc. . . . He . . . was without offence, called a Spanish subject." The fact that Gayarré and Roosevelt do not mention this assertion of Marshall, however, may be due quite as much to the failure of Daniel Clark himself, with all his denunciations of the alleged corruption of Wilkinson, to assert anything worse than that the accused had received a pension from Spain.

⁴ See page 490, note.

I will not deny that every man owes something to the land in which he was born and educated. This something, in whatever form it appears, is founded on self-love ; as for example, an Irishman in Spain, a Spaniard in France, a Frenchman in England, or an Englishman wherever he might be, would boastfully recount the virtues and renown of his respective nation, and would feel sorrow or vexation at any instance of its misfortune or dishonor ; but to assert that an intelligent being, able to do as he sees fit, should plant himself like a vegetable that perchance was a witness of his birth, would be setting at naught the wisdom of Providence and condemning the universal practice of the human race.

When a person of distinction intends to expatriate himself, he ought to proceed with extreme caution and circumspection. He has to ponder well the obligations which subsist between him and his country, ascertaining dispassionately whether he is bound to its service by any tie of confidence, public, positive, or implicit. He ought to bear in mind that this resolution will wound the self-love of those whom he abandons, and consequently will expose his whole life and actions to the severest scrutiny, and his reputation and character to the shafts and flings of slander and calumny. Profoundly impressed with these important truths, laying aside every passion or prejudice, I call upon the reflection with which the goodness of God has endowed me and matured my decision in accordance with reason, honor, and conscience.

Having these principles, and holding to this opinion, I hope that no one can say of me with justice that I break any law of nature or of nations, of conscience or of honor, in transferring my allegiance, from the United States to his Catholic Majesty.¹

Born and educated in America, I embraced her cause in the recent revolution, and steadfastly I adhered to her interests until she triumphed over her enemy. This event, having rendered my services no longer needful, released me from my engagements, dissolved all the obligations, even those of nature, and left me at liberty, after having fought for her welfare, to seek my own. Since the circumstances and policy of the United States have rendered it impossible for me to attain this desired object under her government, I am resolved, without wishing them [the United States] any harm, to seek it in Spain, where I feel persuaded that my conduct will be directed by such principles of loyalty to my sovereign, and of justice to my fellow-subjects as will assure me tranquility of conscience and bear my name untarnished to posterity.

Thus both the regard for my own good name, which I love infinitely more than my life, and that which I profess for you, gentlemen, [*i. e.*, Miro and Navarro], to whom I have the honor to apply, have led me to suppose that, whatever be my future lot, I may rely upon you both as repositories of my honor to bear witness to my principles, and that the motives of my conduct are the real advantage of the country in which I dwell as well as the interest and aggrandizement of the Spanish monarchy ; in pledge of which I affix my signature, the twenty-second of August in the year of our Lord, 1787.

Although he had completed, the day before he made this statement, the elaboration of his earlier discourse before the governor and intendant into the momentous memorial, Wilkinson did not

¹ "Poseyendo estos principios, y abrazando esta opinion, espero que no se podrá decir de mí con justicia que quebranto ninguna ley de naturaleza ó naciones, de conciencia ó honor, en cambiar mi fidelidad de los Estados Unidos á su Majestad Católica."

formally present the same until September 5.¹ The first part of it is devoted to a portrayal of the dissatisfaction of the Kentuckians with the Congress of the Confederation. He emphasizes the rapid increase of population in the west, and their aggressive self-reliance as well. He observes:

In all Republics the execution of the Laws, from obvious causes, is lax, inert and vague; the Americans who pass the Mountains, and seat themselves at a great distance from the executive authority of their respective Governments, availing themselves of this principle, and complaining of the want of those commercial advantages, which their Brethren on the Atlantic enjoy, unitedly declare against taxation, nor can any Person be found among them who will attempt the execution of the Law on this Subject.

He then proceeds to show how incompetent the Congress was to handle the problems of the time, and avows his conviction that it will not procure for the Kentuckians the relief they desire; "the evident consequence of this", he says, "will be a distinct confederation of the western inhabitants." Independence once attained, however, he solemnly assures the Spanish officials that the Kentuckians would resort to any means whatever to gain the free navigation of the Mississippi—an "object on which all their hopes of temporal happiness rest, and without which misery and wretchedness is their certain portion". He further declares that overtures, if made, would first be extended to Spain, and that if they failed, the Kentuckians would ally themselves with Great Britain, and take by force what they could not get by negotiation. The reward of Great Britain would be Louisiana itself.

After a brief account of the machinations of Great Britain against Spain and the United States since the Revolution, he plunges into a discussion of "what ought to be the policy of the Spanish Court at this critical conjuncture", as he terms it. To this end he propounds the following queries:

1st Will it be practicable for us permanently to resist the claim *to the Navigation of the Mississippi* of the already powerful and increasing American settlements, west of the Apalachian Mountains, when aided by a respectable European Power? 2nd Will the resistance of this claim for a few years compensate the King for the expences he must incur thereby or may not this resistance produce consequences more injurious to the Spanish Monarchy than the loss of Louisiana altogether? 3rd Will it be most advisable, by partial indulgence and an accommodating deportment to attach these settlements, and render them subservient to the interest of Spain, or by hostile restraints and rigorous exactions to drive them into the arms of Great Britain.

With a wealth of florid verbiage he deduces from the character

¹ Miro and Navarro to Wilkinson, September 6, 1787, Archivo Historico-Nacional, Estado, Legajo 3893 A.

and circumstances of the Kentuckians a distinct negative to the first two queries. Concerning the third he remarks :

If Spain drives the Americans into the arms of Great Britain she immediately endangers her Louisianian territories, and eventually her Mexican Provinces ; on the contrary, if she attaches the Americans to her interest, she may immediately deduce a vast Revenue from the connexion and establish them a permanent barrier against Great Britain and the United States.

In this state of things his Excellency Don Diego de Gardoqui should without hesitation peremptorily and absolutely refuse to Congress the Navigation of the Mississippi, for should this Gentleman form a treaty, by which the Americans may become intitled to the independent enjoyment of this Navigation, he will destroy the power which Spain now enjoys over the American settlements, and entirely defeat our principal view ; for it may be laid down as an absolute Fact that these Settlements will continue subordinate and look up for protection to that power which secures them this most precious privilege ; let Spain then carefully preserve this right to herself, until she can employ it in exchange for such concessions as she may think proper to demand from the western settlers of America.

The prohibition of intercourse by the Mississippi with the Americans was highly judicious, inasmuch as it has preserved to Spain the power of conferring an inestimable favor (to be priced at her discretion) on a People who, had they been indulged in their claim of the Navigation without interruption, would have viewed Her as an equal, to whom they acknowledged no obligation ; this prohibition should be still supported, *generally*, with as much rigor as ever, tho' in order to conciliate and prepare the Minds of the western Americans for the grand object of these speculations, it may be politic to relax in particular instances, and to offer indulgence to men of real influence ; this conduct would attach the leading characters in that Country to the interest of Spain, would cheer the People with the hope of a free and friendly intercourse, and prevent every act of outrage and hostility : with these prepossessions the transition from the renouncement of the federal Government of America to a Negotiation with the Court of Spain would be natural and immediate.

At this point Spain should rest, and patiently wait the advances of the Americans, but it seems absolutely indispensable that the powers of Government here should be so far enlarged as to authorize the governing officers to treat with the Agent or Agents who may be sent down by the Americans on the leading principles of the connexion, which will both facilitate and expedite the business ; the overture being made by the Americans, Spain will have the Game in her own hands, and as it will doubtless be played by heads much abler than my own it would be presumptuous in me to offer my sentiments on the subject at this time ; I will therefore only observe that I shall be ready to give my feeble assistance at all times, and that I am persuaded the negociation may be so conducted as to secure to Spain every advantage¹ she can wish from the

¹ Cf. Wilkinson's *Memoirs*, II. 114-115 : " But, that I have ever, in all my correspondence and intercourse with the Spanish government, conceded a tittle of the honour or interests of my own country, I most solemnly deny, in the face of God and man ; and I have ample and undeniable testimony to shew that I omitted no occasion, to employ my ascendancy over the officers of Spanish Louisiana, to render them subservient to the interest, and accommodation of the United States."

connexion, without involving her in any dispute with the United States. Spain claims and commands the navigation of the Mississippi which she may dispense to such part of the United States and on such Conditions as her Policy or inclination may direct ; and if any part of the United States should violate the federal pact or the Laws of the union, to obtain this Blessing, it must be the violators, and not the Spanish Court who stand answerable to Congress. In this case Spain will be tacit, and the Americans only will act.

But after all, should this splendid plann be defeated by any circumstance, at present unforeseen and unexpected, I am decidedly of opinion, that the following system of policy and defence will have the strongest tendency to give security to Louisiana, and bids fair, ultimately to produce the Event which we have under contemplation.

He then recommends, as a military and political precaution, the establishment of a fortified post at a trading-station called *L'Ance à la Graisse*¹ (sic), some miles below the junction of the Ohio and the Mississippi, urging the measure as follows :

On strict military principles it is necessary for the immediate defence of the Province, and in a political view it is necessary because, in any negociation which may hereafter take place between Spain and the western Americans, the more respectable and independent the military strength of the former, the greater will be the concessions she will receive from the latter. . . . this Post once established, Spain may admit the settlement of Americans in Louisiana and Florida with safety, tho' I think the former should be encouraged because the soil is preferable, and the measure will tend to alienate and eradicate american principles and connexions ; it should be an invariable maxim not to admit any Person to residence who did not bring with him visible property, or could not give ample security for his good behaviour in the penalty of confiscation : the oath of allegiance should be universally exacted, but as Religion depends on Faith and internal conviction, the first settlers should be left free and unfettered in this respect. . . . Churches should be erected at the public expence and Priests of Piety, Philanthropy and address, who well understand the English Language, habits, and manners should be established in these settlements, not only to propound the holy Gospel, but to educate the rising generation, every other public worship being suppressed ; first the forms and then the principles of the ancient Religion would be adopted : Nor should the military and civil jurisdiction in these settlements be less strictly regarded, it should be comited to Men of liberal Minds and enlarged understanding, who could speak the English Language, and for the occasion would sacrifice every Idea of private Interest ; under such an administration an american would look back with disgust to the caprice of the Government he had abandoned, and, finding himself in the free and secure enjoyment of his property, without taxation, he would become attached to the Government of Spain, by the indissoluble Bonds of Interest and affection. —

This plann, as beneficent as it is political, would produce immediate consequences highly important to Spain, for the early adventurers having reported to their Brethren, whom they left behind, the mildness and equity of the Government, the fertility of the soil, the advantage of the Markets, and above all their exemption from taxation, the emigration

¹ Later New Madrid.

from Kentucky and other American settlements would be as rapid to Louisiana as it ever was from the Atlantic States to the Western Country ; this Province would then rise into immediate Wealth, Strength and National importance. — the very same considerations, therefore, which dispose the United States to resist the population of the western Country should dictate a contrary policy to Spain, for commanding, as she does, the only avenue to exportation, when this vast and luxuriant country becomes populated, she will be able to derive from commercial imposts alone a Revenue more certain and perhaps equal to that of South America.¹

After this disquisition on the proper policy for Spain to pursue, Wilkinson explains the motives or, as he calls them, "the grounds and objects" of his visit—by far the most important part of the memorial:

Know then, that the leading characters of Kentucky, the place of my residence, impatient under the inconveniences and destress which they suffer from the restraints on their commerce, urged and intreated my voyage hither, in order to develop if possible the disposition of Spain towards their Country, and to discover, if practicable, whether she would be willing to open a negociation for our admission *to her protection as subjects*, with certain privileges in political and religious matters, consonant to the Genius and necessary to the happiness of the present generation ; these privileges would have been specifically defined, and I should have borne a written Commission, had not Kentucky (tho' on the eve of establishing herself a free and independent state) still appertained and continued subordinate to the commonwealth of Virginia ; but as I have heretofore observed, I am persuaded the People of this District, so soon as they have organized a Government of their own, will make a formal application to the court of Spain on the subject just mentioned ; and as I am convinced their happiness, as well as the peace of Louisiana, depends upon the success of this application, I shall take much pleasure in employing all my faculties to compass this desirable event,² and for such consideration, as my services may be deemed to merit.

Should this proffer be embraced I shall hold myself in readiness to receive the instructions of Government and to return by the safest and speediest Route to Kentucky, having previously established a confidential correspondent near the seat of Congress, who shall transmit me regularly every act of that Body which can in any shape affect the subject before us.

¹ Wilkinson's memory is at fault when he declares (*Memoirs*, II. 112-113) that he presented at this time an "extensive scheme of colonization" (cf. above, page 493). He did not offer it until September 17, 1789, in a letter, or rather a second memorial, to Miro, after he had learned of the decision of the Spanish government, November 20, 1788, on the general propositions submitted in his first memorial. Archivo Historico-Nacional, Estado, Legajo 3898 B.

² Cf. Wilkinson's statement in his *Memoirs*, II. 113: "The idea of alienating Kentucky from the United States, while a prospect of national protection remained, would have been as absurd, as the idea of reducing them to the vassallage of Spain. Such a proposition would have been so vain and chimerical, that no man, whose interest it was, to preserve a consistency of character with the Spanish government, would have ventured to hazard it. Indeed, the monstrous extravagance of the thought, is too ludicrous for grave consideration, and could never have originated, with any person who understood the character, genius, and government of the people of the United States."

When I return to Kentucky, *if my propositions are embraced in the answer which I may receive to this address*, I shall forthwith proceed though with cautious deliberation to exert my political weight and influence to familiarize and recommend to the Body of the People among whom I live those views which constitute the design of my present voyage, and which have already fixed the attention of the discerning part of that Community, and I will engage constantly to transmit to his Excellency the Governor by trusty Couriers employed for the purpose (who are to be paid by this Government for the hazard and fatigue of the journey) a particular representation of every measure which I may adopt in this important business, as well as every proceeding of Congress interesting to our views and the effects either may produce on the subject. I hope, however, that I shall not [be] condemned for attempting *at the same time that I am labouring to advance a Worck which may lead to the aggrandizement of Spain, and the prosperity of thousands*, to provide for the safety and happiness of my own Family. For this purpose, and to give the strongest assurance of the sincerity of my professions I humbly pray that I may be permitted to transmit to an Agent in this City in Negroes, live Stock, tobacco, Flour, Bacon, Lard, Butter, Cheese tallow, Apples the amount of fifty or sixty thousand Dollars, cost of Kentucky, which articles may be sold for my account, and the proceeds held by his Excellency the Governor, as a pledge for my good conduct until the issue of our plans is known, or I have fixed my residence in Louisiana.¹

In conclusion, Wilkinson hints at the probability that, if the scheme succeeded, the other western settlements would speedily imitate Kentucky by enrolling themselves under the protection of Spain. He declares, however, that the success in question depends upon "the most inviolable secrecy",² the continuance of Miro in his present office, and the appointment of Navarro as minister to the "American Court":

This Gentleman fixed near Congress, from his knowledge of the Subject, would be able to sieze every occasion to advance our views and by this arrangement we should be able to establish a direct communication from Congress thro' the western Country and by Louisiana to the Court.

He terminates the memorial³ as follows:

Pardon, Gentlemen, these reflections, they are dictated by a conviction of their utility, and by my zeal in the cause in which I have engaged. to you, Gentlemen, I have committed secrets of an important nature, such as would, were they divulged destroy my Fame and Fortune for-

¹ "The general has acknowledged to the author of these remarks, that he originally contemplated removing to Natchez, and did favour the policy of the court of Spain, at that time, to populate that district with emigrants from the United States, for motives too obvious to name." "A Plain Tale," etc., in Clark's *Proofs*, appendix, 5.

² "My transactions were confined to Governor Miro, and Intendant Navarro, and of course were secret; which necessarily gave room for every idle conjecture, which whim might suggest or malice dictate." Wilkinson, *Memoirs*, II. 116.

³ Appended to this document are a list and a map of fourteen settlements made by the "vassals of the United States along the rivers or creeks which discharge their waters into the Ohio." The names given are: Alleghany, Monongahela, Tiger's Valley, Green River, New River, Blue Stone, River Holston, French Broad River, Tennessee, Clinck's River, Powel's River, Kentucky, Cumberland River, and the County of Ilinoia.

ever. But I feel the strongest confidence in your silence and discretion, and if the plan should eventually be rejected by the Court, I must rely on the candor and high honor of a dignified Minister to bury these communications in eternal oblivion.

On the day after Wilkinson had presented the memorial Miro and Navarro sent him a formal reply.¹ In it they granted, as a proof of the confidence his propositions had inspired, the right to send from Kentucky a consignment of tobacco, negroes, cattle, swine, and apples, though not to exceed half of the sum he had suggested.² The proceeds therefrom were to be deposited in the provincial treasury as agreed until the king of Spain should signify his pleasure in the matter.³ They promised to recommend his proposals in their

¹ Miro and Navarro to Wilkinson, September 6, 1787, Archivo Historico-Nacional, Estado, Legajo 3893 A.

² Gayarré, therefore, is misleading when he states (*Louisiana*, III. 195) that on the occasion of this first visit Miro gave Wilkinson "permission to introduce into Louisiana, free of duty, many western articles of trade which were adapted to its market". Marshall (*Kentucky*, 283), followed by later writers, including Roosevelt (*Winning of the West*, III. 126), observes: "It was rumoured that he [Wilkinson] had made a contract with the Spanish governor, which enabled him to ship tobacco, and deposite it in the king's store, at ten dollars per hundred. . . . He . . . let it be known that he had an exclusive privilege at New Orleans." Wilkinson, it is true, may have secured from the Spanish officials at this time special rights of trade, in addition to those conceded in the formal permission of September 6, 1787. But there are several reasons to believe the contrary. Among them may be mentioned first, aside from the proverbial caution of the Spanish officials (cf. below, p. 505 note 1), the fact that the laws of the Indies prohibited the grant of commercial privileges to foreigners without the specific approval of the home government. In the second place, the Spanish colonial officials were accustomed to render the most minute reports on their administration, particularly if the business belonged to the reserved or secret class; but, in their presentation of Wilkinson's projects, they allude to no concession beyond the one cited above. With the terms of this concession, furthermore, Wilkinson's own statement (*Memoirs*, II. 115) coincides almost precisely: "I obtained, in the first instance, a permit from Governor Miro, to introduce to the market of New Orleans, thirty-five thousand dollars worth of the produce of Kentucky." Indeed, Wilkinson's more extensive privileges, be it said, date from the second permit, August 8, 1788 (*Ibid.*, 116). Whatever he may have seen fit to give out in regard to his concession when he reappeared in Kentucky was no more than a mixture of personal vainglory with the Spanish propaganda for the promotion of his own pecuniary interests.

³ When the first consignment from Kentucky arrived at New Orleans, the following spring, Abner Dunn, who was in charge of it, had instructions from Wilkinson to ask Miro for an immediate payment of the proceeds from the sale, instead of leaving them in the provincial treasury. As a reason for this favor he pleaded that he could thus cancel a debt of 3,000 dollars contracted during his stay in New Orleans, and pay the boatmen their wages, as well as pay the owners of the shipment for what was due them on the tobacco, which he had purchased on credit. The surplus, furthermore, would enable him to meet other obligations without loss, and hence would conveniently stimulate and enlarge his influence in the Kentucky region. "I have determined to gratify him on this occasion", writes Miro to Valdes, June 15, 1788 (Archivo Historico-Nacional, Est., Leg. 3893 A), ". . . for, if we compare the mischief that might arise from vexing him, and the impediments that the lack of money would doubtless put in the way of his operations, with the greater security we might have in keeping his money in the treasury", he believes the advantage would lie clearly in dispensing with the former stipulation.

report to the home government, and said in conclusion, "Although we are not authorized to grant the favors asked, we are persuaded that his Majesty will heed the reasons . . . in the memorial . . . which fact you can make known to the prominent men and the other inhabitants of the district for their satisfaction and hope."

Before his departure Wilkinson arranged with the Spanish officials to carry on a correspondence in "one of the most incomprehensible of ciphers,¹ in order to be able", say Miro and Navarro,² "to give us the news which this delicate subject may call forth". He sailed from New Orleans for the Ohio by way of Philadelphia, September 16, "very enthusiastic over his task of preparing the minds [of the Kentuckians] for the attainment of the first project",³ *i. e.*, of procuring their subjection to Spain.

In their report⁴ on the memorial the governor and intendant accept as unquestionable the alternatives deduced from Wilkinson's reasoning, namely, the loss of Louisiana—the natural barrier of Mexico—or the adoption of one of the two projects he offers. They descant upon the obvious advantages of the acquisition of Kentucky as an additional bulwark of Mexico, and request their superiors for instructions in dealing with any commissioners who might come from the Ohio region. These instructions should relate to the extent of religious liberty to be allowed the new subjects or settlers, the amount of tobacco to be purchased from them on account of the crown, the scope of their commercial privileges, and the sort of administration to be established among them. The realization of the scheme to annex the western settlements, however, the governor and intendant regard as quite remote, depending as it did upon the action of Congress. On the other hand, the project for encouraging colonization from the Ohio region they felt was immediately practicable, and did not preclude the acceptance of the more radical one whenever the contingency might arise.

¹ Says Wilkinson through the medium of "A Plain Tale", Clark's *Proofs*, appendix, 5, "On the general's first engagement a cypher was formed, more for the security of the communication of his friend, than his own."

² To Valdes, September 25, 1787.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ This document of course belonged to the class of official correspondence marked "reserved by preference". Its joint composition and signature by the governor and intendant show its highly important character. It happened to bear the number 13 in the series. See Gayarré, *Louisiana*, III. 212. This was the origin of the numeral by which Wilkinson was known in his later communications with the Spanish authorities. Archivo Historico-Nacional, Est., Leg. 5564 B. Casa Calvo to Cevallos, March 30, 1804: "El mismo sugeto conocido bajo la indicación del No. 13, cuyo guarismo señaló la representación dirigida al Sor. Bailio Fr. Dn. Antonio Valdes por el gobernador é intendente de estas provincias con fecha de 25 de Setiembre de 1787, ha puesto en mis manos la carta", etc.

The fact that Wilkinson was willing to allow the proceeds from his commercial venture to be placed temporarily in deposit until "the course of his schemes should be perceived", or until he could take up his residence in Louisiana, seemed to obviate any suspicion that he had wished to delude the Spaniards with "grandiose undertakings as a means of realizing a profitable commercial speculation".¹ The well-known circumstances, moreover, of the western country and the quasi-anarchy in the government of the United States apparently substantiated the sincerity of Wilkinson's overtures. Capable as he was of "making the settlers of that region adopt on a critical occasion any procedure he may elect", Miro and Navarro recommended that his energy be stimulated by the approval of their concession of half the amount of imports asked, and by the admission of the other half as well. In either case the goods should come in free of duty. "But, while for the present, the favors should extend no further", write the two officials, "it might be well to have his Majesty signify to Wilkinson that he will be rewarded generously for his services if he succeeds in the first and principal project, or brings all his influence to bear in the accomplishment of the second." They express a desire also to know whether other influential men in Kentucky, as Wilkinson advises, should be given a like privilege of commerce with, however, the imposition of a six per cent. duty.

"In order that the excessive curiosity of the prominent men of this capital may be confined to a single object", conclude the governor and intendant, "we have insinuated that Wilkinson came as a commissioner of the settlements [along the Ohio] to solicit a general permission to send down their produce . . . the good effect of which is that nobody has imagined anything else." This clever arrangement, whereby an ostensibly innocent commercial transaction for the benefit of Wilkinson and the Kentuckians concealed a plot to sever the west from the Union, deprived those who suspected his motives from the outset of anything more effective than surmise and conjecture. Nevertheless his contemporary Marshall doggedly asserts:

These documents, present to the mind two distinct engagements into which General Wilkinson . . . entered, at Orleans: one with the government, by which he . . . obtained the exclusive privilege of trading to that port; and to obtain which he . . . used means, not *necessary*, nor

¹ In his letter to Valdes, June 15, 1788 (Archivo Historico-Nacional, Est., Leg. 3893 A), Miro remarks that, while he believed that Wilkinson was doing a considerable amount of work for the cause, it was possible, nevertheless, that his design was to enrich himself at the mere cost of bolstering up Spanish hopes of advantage, while he knew all along that the scheme was futile.

obligatory, nor HONOURABLE,¹ to be disclosed ; — the other, merely commercial, and which as usual, was committed to a formal contract. This double plot, it was, which perplexed the best informed men in Kentucky, at that day — as the clandestine, and dishonourable part, was carefully concealed from all but coadjutors ; and that which was ostensible, enabled Wilkinson to carry on his political intrigue for many years ; and finally to escape the punishment, due to his perfidy — to the no small emolument of himself and others ; and to the very great annoyance of better, and honester men.²

But neither such assertions as these nor the damaging testimony of Clark's *Proofs* sufficed to establish the whole truth as to what happened during Wilkinson's first visit to New Orleans.

WILLIAM R. SHEPHERD.

¹ Quoted from Wilkinson's mouthpiece in "A Plain Tale" (Clark's *Proofs*, appendix, 5) : "It is neither necessary, nor obligatory, nor would it be honourable to detail the means he employed to effect this object [*i. e.*, procuring for "his fellow citizens in the west . . . the invaluable advantages of a free trade with New Orleans"] it will suffice to say that his country was accommodated and benefited by his enterprise, and that his personal speculations, in their nature politically innocent, were directed to the friendly correspondence, harmonious intercourse, and reciprocal interests of the two countries."

² *Kentucky*, I. 313.